World Chronicle

UNITED NATIONS

PROGRAMME: No. 868 recorded 10 September 2002

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"PUTTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INTO ACTION"

Is the world's environment really helped by large international conferences on sustainable development? And coming out of those conferences, do the agreed goals and timetables really mean a commitment from the international community to real action? Are private sector partnerships on environmental issues effective in protecting the environment, or do they simply provide a public relations boost to the companies? Following the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, Adnan Amin, Director of the New York Office of UNEP, the United Nations Environment Programme, discusses these questions and highlights some specific initiatives that have emerged from the Summit.

WORLD CHRONICLE is produced by the Media Division, Department of Public Information, United Nations, New York, NY 10017, U.S.A.

Duration: 28:00
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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, an unedited interview programme, this is **World Chronicle**.

Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is World Chronicle. From the over-fishing of the oceans to the burning of fossil fuels and the declining diversity of animal and plant species, the list of the world's environmental problems is substantial. The World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg tried to address some of these issues through an action plan, an agreement that now needs to be implemented. But some critics have suggested that economic concerns may have overtaken the environmental agenda. Our guest today is an environmental expert and an economist. He is Adnan Amin, Director of the New York office of UNEP, the United Nations Environment Programme. Joining me to talk to Mr. Amin are Tuyet Nguyen of German Press Agency and James Wurst of UN Wire. Mr. Amin, welcome to **World Chronicle**.

AMIN: Thank you,

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Amin, your boss, Clause Dopenferg???, when asked to comment on the success of otherwise of the UN summit in Johannesburg came out with a rather restraint reply. You said he was satisfied. Tell us some of the pluses and minuses, positives and negatives that you see from the conference.

AMIN: I think by satisfaction, he meant that this was a conference of a different nature to the original Rio conference.

LITTLEJOHNS: The Rio Conference was the Earth summit.

AMIN: Yes, the Earth summit went ten years ago. And the Earth summit was an exceptional conference. It was the beginning of the global cycle of summits; it marked a time of optimism in the world community. It was a time where we had come to the end of the cold war, the Berlin wall had fallen, there were boundless opportunities or so it seems at the time, with the talk of the peace dividend, of the green dividend, of finances freed from military means, being available for development and for the environment, so I think there was a tremendous outpouring of optimism that underpinned the conference. And it was twenty after Stockholm, the beginning of the realization that we needed ...

LITTLEJOHNS: That was the first environment.

AMIN: The first environment conference in Stockholm, which established United Nations...

LITTLEJOHNS: In 1972.

AMIN: Yes, 72, which established UNEP. And the new sentiment was that we needed to look at environment in different context, in the context of development; not as an issue of just quality, of environmental quality, of pollution, but of something integral to development. And I think the type of sentiments that characterize the Rio summit and allowed the development of an action plan, like agenda 21 was unprecedented. I think a lot of people perhaps, especially in the civil society had the expectation that this might be a summit of similar character. But I think it was entered completely different historical juncture; there were different issues to address, and I think we need to bare in mind what the purpose of the summit as define by the General Assembly was. It was to take stock of where we are with the implementation of agenda 21, to re-invigorate global commitment to sustainable development, to identify new challenges and new areas of activity and to try to come with a plan for the implementation of agenda 21, especially in areas which haven't been realized.

LITTLEJOHNS: Which conferences of this nature organized by the UN often called World Summits would you say that they are affected negatively re-precautions from the events of September 2001?

AMIN: To an extent I am certain that that is the case. I think we are living in a time of great uncertainty in the global community, and that uncertainty touches on many different aspects of the UN endeavor, not just in the peacekeeping and political area, but in economic and social and environmental areas. It conditions the attitudes of governments, it has given birth to new priorities, which the international community has to look at. So certainly, there are some impacts on it.

NGUYEN: Mr. Amin, there are groups and a lot of people who do not share with you the sense of optimism that has...Many things have to be done to stop the deterioration of the environment. They say the UN always claims successes whereas they don't see those successes. Is there a way for you to measure or give us ordinary people, you know, pictures of what really has been achieved, so that everybody can come on board?

AMIN: Of course but first of all let me say I am guardedly optimistic because with an outcome like this the proof of the pudding is in the eating as they say. And I think we are

going to be able to tell in the coming years whether this was really a success or not. But we would also be disappointed if the activists, the environmental activists, those who are very committed and passionate about causes, would be happy with this kind of agreements. Their job is really to point out the areas where there are problems, their job is to try to mobilize political will, to point governments and international organizations in the right direction, outline what are their concerns. So naturally their expectation of success would be somewhat different from ours. But I think we live in a world which is a little more realistic and we have to try to understand that what we can achieve has to be implemental, it has to be grounded in the political realities of the times, and in that context, I think there are some positive areas. There are thirty old targets contained in the programme of implementation. They are diverse, they relate to water, sanitation, they relate to fisheries, agriculture, poverty, many of them are similar targets that we already agreed to in the millennium development goals. But I think what is important about all of this is that there is a realization that this is not just about lofty talk anymore. This is about looking at what our realistic, realistically achievable targets, trying to set those targets and try to engender a political will to move in that direction.

LITTLEJOHNS: But Mr. Amin, you speak about targets, but there are so far ahead. I mean some are 2020, I think the nearest is something like 2010. So I mean it gives awful long time for things to continue as bad as they are today, before anything is done.

AMIN: Well, to an extent you might be right. But on the other hand, with some of these targets, to achieve those targets, for example restoring the fish stocks; if we are to move in that target, we have to start with action today. In fifteen years time down the road when we are asked to account for having reached that target or not reached it,

LITTLEJOHNS: ... is already commercially extinct as they put it.

AMIN: Yes, that is one of the indicators speeches that have caused the problem. That is why there is so much attention on this issue. Fishing provides livelihood and protein for huge percentage of the world population. If we are now at the stage where because of commercial practices that ignore environmental realities, when the state when we might collapse with the fisheries, it will have a major impact in terms of nutrition, food availability and so on. So that is the type of issue that has led to this kind of agreement and in fact it is quite a far-reaching agreement if it can be implemented.

LITTLEJOHNS: On the question over fishing?

AMIN: (Nods head)

WURST: Staying on the subject of targets, one of the things that does not have a target or deadline, or timeline is the question of certain percentage of energy being produced through renewable energy sources in other words to try to cut down on fossil fuel consumption and of course as a major cost, the green house gases that didn't happen largely through the opposition of the United States and OPEC countries and a few others. Now how can you make a real progress on something so fundamental as reversing global warming without any sort of agreement on any kind of timetable here?

AMIN: What you didn't mention on the other hand, is that we had at the summit the Canadian Prime Minister informing the Summit that he was going to present the Kyoto protocol to his parliament for ratification this year. Russia, the Russian federation said the similar thing. So there is, and they were made with tremendous applause. They were a number of other countries that informed of their ratification of the protocol. So I think there is a tremendous political will to deal with global warming and a huge commitment to the Kyoto protocol. The youth??? of course doesn't believe that the Kyoto protocol is the way to address climate change in the longer term, but at the same time in Mr. Powell's statement to the summit, he did say that they are committed to the target of dealing with climate change, they didn't believe that Kyoto was the right instrument to do it, but that they would be taking a number of other measures. We still wait to see what those measures will be, and we hope that they move in the right direction. But I think we were disappointed that there were no targets on renewables. I think this is really one of the challenges for the future. We have had so much discussion and so much political support behind that target. It was disappointing that we couldn't achieve it on this occasion. But I think, let's bear in mind that we already have in the energy mix between ten and fourteen percent of renewables already in the mix. The fifteen percent target was really to get the ball rolling at faster rate as it were. But I think that the reality is that renewables are going to be more and more important both for political as well as for economic reasons.

NGUYEN: ...been targeted for reaching certain limit on renewable?

AMIN: No, there was no target.

NGUYEN: Is this a concession to Western countries or the United States?

AMIN: It was as Mr. Wurst said; it was essentially the US and most of the OPEC countries, which were not in favor of this target. And as you know, we have to have

consensus. So we were not able to achieve that, but I think that the economic and political reality is that this is needed. We are at a stage now where we have to address very seriously how we are going to proceed in this direction, and I think the technology, the scientific advances that we have now are positioning us to do this. What we need is really the political will to take that extra step on this issue.

NGUYEN: What about funding? Have you been able to get commitments from governments to provide funds to carry out those plans?

AMIN: There were a number of commitments announced during the summit. If I recall right the EU announced seven hundred million for renewable energy. They announced several hundred million dollars for water related projects. The US did the same. A number of governments spoke about their commitments and especially as related to type two activities, these are the partnership activities to implement the outcomes of the summit. What is not clear and should become clear in the course of time is whether this money is additional to what already exists in the overall ODA pot??? or whether it is really a reallocation of priorities within the funding we have already.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is World Chronicle; our guest is Adnan Amin, Director of the New York Office of UNEP, United Nations, Environment Programme.

WURST: To go back to the issue of success or failure, obviously governments had different views; President Chavez of Venezuela was not pleased. Of course, as you already mentioned the NGOs, a lot of editorial opinion. One point raised here is the Australian newspaper said that the Summit was a waste of the hundred million dollars, and the only big consensus was and I am quoting now:" that it should probably be the last mega conference of its kind". Is this going to be the last mega conference of its kind? If so, what replaces it?

AMIN: Well, first of all, perhaps a prospective from Australia is different, but I don't think it was a hundred million dollars.

WURST: They just said dollars...

AMIN: Australian dollars, perhaps.

LITTLEJOHNS: Oh yes, probably

WURST: They just said dollars.

AMIN: But on their comment on the summit format, I think they have a point. I think we have reached a point now where we have had a succession of summits over the last ten

years, and there appears to be diminishing returns from the summit format. There was a lot discussion ... Johannesburg that while everybody worked very hard to come to the final agreement, I think the thinking now is moving very much in the direction that we need much more concrete targeted and manageable agendas rather than having this huge global agendas which are almost impossible to deal with despite the fact that we had full preparatory meetings to prepare for this conference.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Amin, tell us a bit about corporate's partnerships. What is happening there?

AMIN: This is the big difference with Rio, which I think is very positive is that when we went to the Rio Conference ten years ago business was not really present. At this conference in Johannesburg, we had a tremendous turnout from the business sector; we had very high-level participation by...

LITTLEJOHNS: But they were probably tying to protect their rear ends, weren't they?

AMIN: Well, this is the question; in fact there was a discussion in the plenary in which I took part, which was moderated by Minister Pronk or Former Minister Pronk of the Netherlands, and special adviser to the secretary-general. And he asked me these questions, and I said, well, he was talking about globalization, and I said well, the private sector is a major actor in globalization and we should ask them why they are with us at this conference. Is it because they are nice chaps with families and they want to do the right thing? Or is it because there is an unprecedented public demand for accountability? Not only in the wake of the recent corporate scandal we have seen, but in a more fundamental sense that people, consumers everywhere are ranking corporations according to their social responsibility and that includes environment responsibility. And I think that is why they were there. They were there and I think many of them were there as serious partners. And I think that was a very positive aspect of this conference we haven't seen before.

LITTLEJOHNS: And what is going to come out of that?

AMIN: Well there are a number of partnerships, which the private sector has agreed to take part in. We have a paragraph in the panel of implementation, which talks about developing some kind of monitoring of corporate social responsibility. What we really need to do is now that we are armed with all of this is to devise a system of monitoring what is happening if

the private sector corporation make commitments to monitor the implementation of those commitments and to hold them responsible for it.

NGUYEN: Is there a way to measure how they cooperate with you or with any plans to really sort of...I am talking about you know companies that just dump their waste in rivers, in forest, in source, and how many the health of people??? How did you really go around and monitor those compliance?

AMIN: It is difficult. What we have done, and at the same time, we don't want to stifle private sector creativity and enterprise. We have to bear in mind that the economic model now is based on private capital and on the private sector.

LITTLEJOHNS: Even if it pollutes like hell?

AMIN: Well the challenge is to prevent it from polluting, to move to models that are moving away from the polluting model, and I think that we are in that direction. If we see some of the corporations now, which have commitments, which are measurable commitments; there are some big oil corporations now, which are dealing with the missions trading, they have commitments to decrease their own emissions of carbon as a contribution to the climate change. So there are things that are happening. What we have done is that we have established a global reporting initiative under the global compact of the Secretary-General, where a number of countries become members of the global reporting initiative and agree that their commitments can be monitored; so they report back on that, so that there is some accountability. But it is very difficult to impose this model on the rest of the private sector.

LITTLEJOHNS: You have a specific example, something which is already working?

AMIN: With the global reporting initiative?

LITTLEJOHNS: Yes.

AMIN: In the area of chemicals we have several corporations that have signed onto observe the international agreement in the area of chemicals and their activities can be monitored in the report back on what they are doing to achieve those targets. We have initiative with the banking industry. We have the top commercial banks in the world signed on to an environmental charter with UNEP under which they are committed to orient a landing away from environmentally destructive activities. And they are doing that, and that is being reported.

WURST: ...economic argument around just a little bit and noticing that in the last few years that sort of a trend to stress the economic financial benefits and sustainable

development with this year from your own programme talking about the messy American Col Riff and saying in a recent steady show that a healthy Col Riff is worth 75% more than destructive and not sustainable fishing, you get in this, you get in renewable energy, that fisheries as well. Is that sort of arguments, in other word an income of finance based argument resignating across the border with NGOs or North-South financial institutions? Is it a workable? Is the argument an effective argument?

AMIN: There are two levels there. On one level, many of the NGOs are extremely suspicious about the commitment of business to environmental agreements. Many of them believe that business is signing up to this kind of approach primarily to inject a greener image for their marketing. Perhaps in some cases that is correct. But in a broader sense, the economic argument linked to environment is compelling. You mentioned Mr. Littlejohns in the beginning that there was some dispute about whether environment was being subsumed by economic in the summit. On the contrary I think the challenge of this summit, and one it has succeeded in achieving was how do we bring the three legs of sustainable development, environment, social and economic together. How do we look at things in an integrated way? And the example we gave of the Col riff is a primary one. We have in the plan of implementation an understanding now that we need to take an eco-system approach. When you look at Col Riff as an eco-system, it has fundamental importance to the health of the oceans, fisheries and so on; it is a seabed of the ocean. It is where the majority of fish species regenerate themselves with the breeds, and which regulates the quality of the sea also. So there are very important economic values that have never been calculated as far as the environment is concerned, which has led too much of the crisis that we are dealing with now. And I think one of the challenges in the future is going to be how do we integrate the real cost, the real environmental cost into economic pressing in the future.

NGUYEN: What were the steps, you know the concrete steps taken by the summit in Johannesburg in the coming years to follow up on the implementation of these programmes?

AMIN: Well, this General Assembly session starting now is going to be very important in a sense where this is where we are going to establish the monitoring mechanism, the mechanisms that will be looking at the implementation requirements that will be setting the kind of perimeters that need to be observes and the world programme of the bodies, of the inter-

governmental bodies that will be working on the implementation of the plan. So I think this is where we start to do that and we are hoping for strong outcome from the session, which will really put in place the mechanism for implementing the plan. And as I said the success of this conference will be judged not now about what is on paper, but what we will be able to achieve in a few years time.

NGUYEN: When will be the next time governments will meet to discuss environment again?

AMIN: We have several bodies that are meeting regularly. We haves established as a result of UN reform the global ministerial environment forum, which meets every year and we have 90 to 100 environment ministers every year coming to discuss this. So that would be the next one in February in Nairobi in Kenya.

LITTLEJOHNS: What decisions were taken on renewable energy in the context of sustainable development?

AMIN: The renewable energy decision was a very broad one, which was more an exhortation to government to increase the amount of renewable energy in the overall energy mix. But it wasn't the only decision that was important, I think there were important decision taken toward insuring access to energy for this huge amount of population that is not.

LITTLEJOHNS: But you also, or rather the conference launched some sustainable energy centers, is that right?

AMIN: Yes, that was a UNEP initiative. What we have at the moment is there are a number of centers that exist in developed countries that hold certain technologies or know how on how to deal with renewable energies. What we are proposing is to expand this network and to make that kind of knowledge available together with technical capacity and capacity building of availability of people to deal with that technology in developing countries. So that is a major initiative that we are launching at this conference and there were number of others, the EU, the European Union has launched a major, seven hundred million dollars initiative on renewable energy also. Many of this will be going in the same direction. So there will be some cumulative effects also.

WURST: Let's go to with one more very fundamental issue, water. More than a billion people don't have access to water. Fresh water supply is shrinking, over used, over irrigation, what do you do?

AMIN: It was one of our Secretary-Generals who said the wars of the future will be fought over water not land. It is a huge, huge problem and I think everyday we see new evidence emerging. I was reading today about the sea of Galilee which has declined of twenty feet in the last two years in its levels. The fact that fresh water availability is increasing, the constraint of population is growing, and we are going to find fundamentally new ways of how we are going to deal with the fresh water crisis. It is a huge issue. And I think is part of it is efficiency; part of it is trying to deal with the consumption and production patterns we have in the world. The amount of water consumed by people in developed countries as opposed to water consuming in developing countries. We have to find a more equitable way of dealing with water issues. And I think the key to the approach has to be equity. We have technical possibilities to deal with water issues, but it is in the end a question of political will and it is a political issue.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Amin, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**. Our guest has been Adnan Amin, Director of the New York Office of UNEP, the United Nations, Environment Programme. He was interviewed by Tuyet Nguyen of German Press Agency/DPA, and James Wurst of UN Wire.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

ANNOUNCER: Transcripts of this programme may be obtained free of charge by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to **World Chronicle**, United Nations, Room S-827S, New York, N.Y., 10017.

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